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SUBJECT: SPANISH POLICE DISRUPT AL-ZARQAWI SUPPORT NETWORK

REF: MADRID 2223

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathy Fitzpatrick for reasons 1.4 (B)  
) and (D)

1. (U) Spanish police arrested 16 suspected Islamic terrorists early June 15 in two related operations involving over 500 police officers. The arrests took place in Madrid, Catalonia, Andalucia, Levante and Ceuta; with 13 of those detained being natives of Morocco, two others from Algeria and one whose origin is undetermined. Of those arrested, 11 are believed to be linked to the al-Zarqawi terrorist network, while the remaining five are linked to the March 11, 2004 attacks in Madrid. In a related announcement, Spanish Ministry of Interior officials said that they believe Mohamed Afalah, a fugitive suspect in the March 11th bombings, "presumably" committed a suicide attack in Iraq between May 12-19.

2. (U) The 11 suspects linked to al-Zarqawi constituted an Islamic support network affiliated with Ansar al-Islam that aimed to recruit radicals willing to commit suicide attacks against coalition forces in Iraq. The group, reportedly headed by Samir Tahtah and seconded by Yagoub Guemereg, allegedly sent terrorists to Iraq, via Syria, using the internet to coordinate movements with members of Ansar Al Islam. Of the 11 arrested, three are believed to have been involved in recruitment while the remainder engaged in petty crimes (such as drug trafficking, robbery and the sale of false documents) to raise money for the network. The names of these 11 suspects are: Samir Tahtah; Yagoub Guemereg; Abadelbarie Dahane; Fouad Dkikar; Mustafa Filali; Omar Boulaich Lyazidi; Mostafa Roumane; Ahmed Assas; Faruk Abidi; Tarek Hamed Hamu; and Latif Hamed Hamu. All of these suspects, with the exception of Yagoub Guemereg (Algerian), are of Moroccan descent.

3. (U) Five people were arrested in connection to the March 11th attacks in Madrid; four of them charged with assisting Mohamed Afalah, a major participant in the attacks, to flee Spain. The press reports the identities of these four as: Mohamed El Idrissi (Moroccan), Asan Amrani Boukhobza (Moroccan), Abdenneri Essebar (Algerian) and Driss "El Gordo" (real name and nationality unknown). The remaining suspect, Mohamed Larbi Ben Sellam (Moroccan), is considered one of the major players in the March 11th attacks and will be one of only nine suspects in the case that will face mass murder charges for each of the 191 people who died. The remaining suspects in the March 11th case, more than 100 in all, all face lesser charges, to include membership in a terrorist organization.

4. (U) Interior Ministry officials released a statement outlining the route that Mohamed Afalah used to travel from Spain to Iraq, where they believe he executed a suicide attack against coalition forces. Ministry officials believe that Afalah fled from Spain to Belgium after the March 11th attacks, where he stayed with first Mimoun and Yousef Belhadj, then Mourad Chabarou (aka Mohamed Rey) and finally with "Mohamed the Egyptian", who is detained in Italy for his connection to the March 11th attacks. Afalah then reportedly traveled to Syria, enroute to Iraq, and is presumed to have died in a suicide attack on coalition forces sometime between May 12-19. Ministry officials base this presumption on intercepted telephone calls between Afalah and his father in which he expressed his desire to become a martyr.

#### COMMENTS

5. (C) These arrests represent the Spanish government's continuing crackdown on Islamic terrorism within its borders, as represented by the fact that over 100 suspected Islamic terrorists have been arrested in the past 12 months. In addition, these operations take place against the backdrop of the first major trial of alleged Islamic terrorists in Spain (see refTel on the trial of alleged al-Qa'ida member Barakat Yarkas), which will serve as a test of the Spanish judicial system's ability to successfully prosecute this type of crime. The large numbers of Islamic defendants being taken into custody in regard to terrorist activities could place a strain on the Spanish judicial system, which sets a time limit of four years from the time of detention to trial.

Spanish authorities have demonstrated great skill in disrupting Islamic terrorist organizations and, in the Barakat Yarkas trial, now face their greatest challenge in prosecuting Islamic terrorist suspects.

MANZANARES